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JFK Probers, FBI Fight Over a Bullet

Washington

A buried bullet found by an amateur treasure hunter near where President Kennedy was assassinated has touched off a clash between the FBI and the House committee on assassinations.

The FBI has the bullet, found two years ago by Richard Lester, who used a metal detector on railroad property in the area where Kennedy was shot Nov. 22, 1963.

The bureau wants to compare the bullet with test shots fired from the rifle of Lee Harvey Oswald that are now locked up at the National Archives along with the bullets and fragments used in the killing.

But acting archivist James O'Neill has refused to give the FBI the exhibits, over which the committee claims jurisdiction.

Committee staff director Richard Sprague asked the FBI Monday for the Lester bullet. As of yesterday had got no reply.

An FBI spokesman gave these details:

"In December, 1976, a private citizen made available to the Dallas FBI office a bullet allegedly found two years ago in the general area of the Kennedy assassination in Dallas. The bullet was sent to the FBI (Washington) laboratory by the Dallas office for examination.

"It is not possible to determine whether or not the bullet has any bearing on President Kennedy's assassination until appropriate microscopic comparisons have been made. Therefore the FBI has asked the national archives to make available test bullet specimens for comparison.

"Several bullets were test-fired from Oswald's gun for the Warren Commission and also for us. In 1967, all evidence in the assassination matter was turned over to the archives. The bullet was very badly damaged. We can't even tell what caliber it was."

This leaves the FBI with a mangled bullet of unknown importance — there have been claims that shots were fired other than from Oswald's gun — and the House committee claiming it has rights to the original bullets, fragments and test firings from Oswald's rifle, all of which are housed in the archives.

Lester, a Dallas maintenance man whose hobby is searching for buried coins with a metal detector, found the bullet several inches beneath the surface of railroad property off Dealey plaza near the Texas School Book Depository.

Fearing that the railroad would confiscate the find, he kept silent until reading that the investigation into Kennedy's assassination was reopening and then turned the bullet over to the FBI.

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